

Beirut's rooftops open up for summer season

With the heat in the city rising, escape to the skyline heights for an evening cocktail

By Emma Gatten
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Fresh air is hard to come by in Beirut, a city where congestion is rife and green space is sparse. So its rooftop bars, elevated above the noise and pollution, are a welcome summer retreat. So welcome in fact that this year sees several new arrivals on the open-air scene.

The latest is The Roof, a sweeping lounge bar sitting at the top of the Four Seasons' 25 floors, which opened earlier this month. At 118 meters high, the hotel is the tallest building currently in use in the city and offers a panoramic view of the sea and the sunset that is difficult to fault, especially while sipping one of the bar's signature rose mojitos.

"We have had the rooftop since we opened [the hotel] last year," says Huda Malhas, the Four Seasons' director of marketing. "We thought it was a shame not to have it available for those not staying here at the hotel."

As is fitting for a bar atop one of the city's most refined hotels, The Roof takes a pared-down approach compared to many of Beirut's more glitzy establishments. The décor is all clean lines and neutral colors, the furniture made mostly in Lebanon, with some additions shipped in from Italy. The drinks menu is unfussy, offering a range of spirits from which cocktails can be prepared to request.

The bar has three lives, Malhas says, with its post-daytime incarnation split between the sunset and the night crowd.

"We'd like the bar to be somewhere that people come for a post-work drink," says Malhas. "That's something people do in Europe, for instance, but there's not really a tradition of it here. We think The Roof could be the place to do that."

Not too far from the Four Seasons is another newcomer, Iris, which opened for the first time in May, atop An-Nahar's building in the Downtown area, replacing the rooftop's previous resident, White bar, which is promising a relaunch elsewhere soon.

Iris is a more relaxed affair than its predecessor, offering an evening spot for food and drinks, rather than all-night partying.

But if these newest additions suggest that Beirut's party scene might be calming down, then the seasonal opening night of Sky Bar, one of Beirut's best-known rooftop clubs, last Friday, put paid to such notions. Though there was slightly less fanfare than expected (a rumored appearance from rapper T-Pain never materialized) there were no fewer crowds, proving that the 8-year-old club is still a firm favorite among the city's partygoers.

To top this off is Pier7, an ambitious open-air dockside complex in Nahr al-Mott, encompassing both club and restaurant, the opening of which is set to take place June 30. The venue, which has a potential capacity of up to 2,000 looks likely to embrace the tendency to excess that can be seen in the city, with a pier extending into the sea, and seven private suites which include their own bars, terraces and facilities.

The city is set for a lively summer and it seems that nothing, even the regional turmoil, is likely to get in the way. In Beirut, says Malhas, "nothing stops people from going out ... If you can get to somewhere and party, then you will party."



The Roof, the Four Seasons' latest addition, with panoramic views of the sea, the mountains and Downtown.

FEATURE

Madees Khoury: Taste the revolution in Taybeh

By Olivia Snajje
Special to The Daily Star

TAYBEH, Occupied West Bank: Beer brewing is an industry long dominated by men. In the U.S., women began to penetrate the smaller independent breweries in the 1980s, but, as was noted in a recent article on the rise of women brewers in The Atlantic magazine, it's only in the past few years that "they've been building a collective identity as women brewers, and not just 'one of the boys.'"

Few women brewers could imagine that they had a colleague in the Palestinian West Bank in the form of 25-year-old Boston-born Madees Khoury. Khoury is the daughter of Nadim Khoury, the brew master of Palestine's Taybeh Beer. She has been working alongside her father full time since graduating from Bir Zeit University four years ago. One day she's likely to take his place as master of the brew.

Taybeh microbrewery is located in the mainly Christian village from which it takes its name. Just over 20 kilometers from Jerusalem, it's mentioned in the Old Testament.

Perched on a Palestine hilltop surrounded by Israeli settlements, the village benefits from pure spring water that Khoury said is the most important ingredient in Taybeh beer.

The water is hard-earned. Israel controls the main valve and "they give us a lot of trouble," said Khoury. "They often close the valve that brings the water to towns around Ramallah. We can live with regulations and security checks. Of course it's harassment. When the water is shut off for just one day this changes our production. We need water for everything. We have reserve tanks on roofs but it's not enough."

Madees Khoury's family is an integral part of the community – her uncle David is the mayor – a well-off clan that had emigrated to Brookline, Massachusetts. They returned to the West Bank 25 years later, full of hope after the 1993 Oslo accords.

Khoury's father Nadim began making beer in his college dorm when home brewing became a trend in the 1980s and went on to the University of California at Davis to study brewing science. The family decided to open a brewery in Taybeh in 1994, mortgaging their houses and putting up \$1.2 million of their own savings, as no bank would give them a loan.

"Everyone said opening a brewery in the Middle East was crazy," Khoury recalled.

Seventeen years later, Taybeh is still up and running, although some years are better than others. "As long as the situation is calm," Khoury said, "then we do well."

She was 10 when she moved from Boston to Taybeh, although every summer had been spent in the family village.

The eldest in a family of three, Khoury said her interest in brewing grew as she watched her family build a business and saw "how dedicated they all are" in the face of obstacles. "That's what encouraged me to follow in my father's footsteps," she said.

She likes brewing, she said, because she feels it "combines science and art."

While she doesn't have her father's scientific background, she has learned from him, and has visited many breweries and taken courses in brewing and packaging.

Khoury recently won a scholarship for a German-run brewing program in China. "It was such an experience," she said. "Everything was completely different from what I know. Even the way they brew their beer is totally different."

Taybeh imports French and Belgian malt, and hops from the Czech Republic and Bavaria to make their entirely natural dark, amber and golden beer. The Khourys recently added a non-alcoholic beer to their line that people jokingly refer to as Hamas' beer.

The brewery used to export most of its production to Israel but, since the second intifada, road closures and harassment at checkpoints have made deliveries and exports to other countries extremely difficult.

Khoury said non-alcoholic beer was necessary for the company to increase its market share in Palestinian cities where alcohol is forbidden – such as Hebron, Tulkarem, Jenin and Nablus. The 10 percent that Taybeh exports internationally goes to Japan,

Sweden and Chile. Taybeh beer is franchised in Germany and then sold to Belgium and the U.K.

On brewing days Khoury is up at 4 a.m. and begins brewing an hour later. Taybeh's output is currently 600,000 liters a year and Khoury is working on expanding the brand internationally.

"We're doing that slowly because at the same time we like to stay small, to have more control over quality," she said. "We're trying to franchise in the U.S. ... that would contribute so much to the company. A lot of Americans are very supportive and write to wish us good luck, and that motivates you."

Khoury doesn't seem to face undue discrimination in a traditionally male-dominated industry.

"My village is very supportive and proud," she said. "They all say good things about me. I have some difficulty with narrow-minded people, like traditional old men who have been in business for 30 years and would rather deal with my father."

"There's a little store in Taybeh that sells beer and when we had a small increase in price, the guy didn't want to talk to me. This is insulting but I just look away."

This attitude doesn't differ much from what U.S. brew master Laura Ulrich is quoted as saying in The Atlantic. "When I'm with a group of brewers, people will walk up straight to the men and not even acknowledge me being a part of it," she's quoted as saying, "unless I introduce myself, it's almost like I'm not there."

Still, the industry is changing everywhere and Khoury sees an evolution in her transactions with new restaurants run by a younger generation, including women.

Khoury and her family will soon begin preparations for their annual Oktoberfest. "We have people emailing us from all over the world. Last year was our sixth annual festival and we hosted 12,000 people" she said proudly. She will be manning the Taybeh taps wearing a T-shirt with Taybeh's logo: Taste the Revolution.



Madees Khoury takes a sip of Taybeh beer in the occupied West Bank.

Photo by Veronique Bangelemont

World Chefs: Holzman feeds New York's meatball fans

By Richard Leong
Reuters

NEW YORK: Daniel Holzman is planning to open meatball eateries in New York, a niche he helped to create in a city that's mad for hamburgers.

The 32-year-old chef and his longtime friend Michael Chernow opened The Meatball Shop more than a year ago. They now sell 2,000 of their meaty creations smothered in a variety of sauces each day.

The New York City native spoke to Reuters about his passion for meatballs and why they are a universal food.

Q: How did you come up the idea for the restaurant?

A: "The meatball concept came when I was sitting with my partner [Chernow] at the restaurant he was working at before and eating a bowl of their meatballs, rigatoni and sausage in this sauce. He would always order it but without the rigatoni because he didn't want to eat the carbohydrate late at night when he was getting off work as a bartender. Eating this meatball reminded me of Italy when eating them was the main course, the prized course, the star of the meal."

Q: Are you surprised how quickly you are expanding?

A: "When we originally talked about this concept, we had talked about let's make this restaurant as simple as possible with the eye toward that if we are lucky, we could expand."

Q: But the meatballs you sell are not typical.

A: "On an objective level when you order from The Meatball Shop, you may not agree with it. You can say it's not authentic risotto because in Italy, you would never serve meatballs over risotto. You can always find a fault when you have rules. But when you forget the rules and taste the food, it's delicious. When you get the bill, it's really inexpensive as well."

Q: What meatballs do you like best?

A: "I tend to like simpler, classic profiles. I also like the Japanese meat-

balls that you get in little grill places like Yakitori Toito [a Japanese restaurant in New York] where I had their chicken meatballs ... Every culture has a meatball. They all share the same principle, but they are all different."

Pork Meatballs and Spicy Meat Sauce (yields 24)
2 pounds pork shoulder, ground
1-1/3 tbsp. salt
4 each hot cherry peppers, minced (about 1/3 cup)
1/4 cup pepper pickling liquid
4 slices white bread, minced (about 3-1/2 cups)
3 eggs
2 tbsp. olive oil

Preheat the oven to 450 F. Combine all of the ingredients except for the olive oil in a large mixing bowl and mix by hand.

Drizzle the olive oil into a large baking dish. Roll the mixture into round, golf ball sized meatballs making sure to pack the meat firmly.

Place the balls into the baking dish so that all of the meatballs are lined up evenly in rows and are touching each of their four neighbors in a grid. Roast until firm and cooked through (about 14 minutes).

Spicy Meat Sauce (yields 8 cups)
1 large yellow onion, small dice (about 2 cups)
1 pound pork shoulder, ground
2 tbsp. olive oil
2 tsp. chili flakes
2 tsp. salt
2 tbsp. tomato paste
2 28-oz. cans of chopped tomato

Cook the onions and pork with the olive oil, chili flakes and salt over a medium heat in a large pot stirring constantly until the meat is thoroughly cooked and the onions are soft and beginning to brown (about 15 minutes).

Add the tomato paste and continue cooking for five minutes. Add the canned tomatoes and stir constantly until the sauce begins to boil. Cook for 35 minutes stirring regularly.

Sales hopes ride high on Chinese demand at Bordeaux wine fair after difficult few years

By Marcel Michelson
Reuters

BORDEAUX, France: The 30th international wine and spirits fair in Bordeaux opened this week with participants hoping for higher orders than during the relative wash-out of two years ago in the midst of economic crisis.

While financial turmoil in Europe and other regions still depresses consumer sentiment, winemakers expect much from the rising demand of emerging market economies and in particular countries such as China as buyers and trade representatives walk the long halls of the Vinexpo trade fair, held every two years.

"If it goes like last time round, we will no longer have a Vinexpo but Vinaigrexpo," joked Daniel-Etienne Defaix, a winemaker from the Chablis area, making a play on the French words for wine and vinegar.

"Last time I left the show with zero orders," he added, as he poured his 2002 vintage that is coming to the market this year and has been judged favorably by the wine press. Defaix releases his

wines later to the market than many other makers of the white Burgundy wine of the area around the town of Chablis.

Vinexpo has turned into a high mass of the wine industry, full with pageants such as the Jurade dinner of Saint-Emilion or the Flower Party evening where the big names of the world wine industry, and especially those of Bordeaux, meet for small talk and big business.

"We have gone through an unprecedented crisis but are in a substantial market," said Xavier de Eizaguirre, chairman of Vinexpo at the opening ceremony. "We see good prospects, especially in the fast-growing economies of Asia and in particular in China."

French Agriculture Minister Bruno Le Maire urged French growers to continually improve the quality of the wines to stay ahead in the competition with big producer countries like Chile and Argentina. He also called on more unity in the sector.

"A French disease is too much squabbling, too much multiplication, too many umbrella organizations. What we need is a common front," he said, referring to a Chinese wine buyer he recently met who had said he needed big quantities of wines of a common quality and taste for the Chinese market.

These quantities are often larger than a single winemaker can provide.

French foreign affairs minister, and Bordeaux city mayor, Alain Juppe underlined the importance of the wine industry for his town, region and the country where it is the second-biggest exporter after the aeronautics sector.

Bordeaux, and the rest of the French wine industry, suffers from a split personality with an expensive luxury sector of top wines that lure billionaires, to the more mundane supermarket class of wines that compete with themselves and the rest of the world.

At Vinexpo this year, there are 2,400 exhibitors from 47 countries and an expected 40-45,000 visitors. Some 60,000 to 70,000 bottles will be opened, and mostly spit out after tasting. France is the largest exhibitor.

Expected trends on the show are a continued rise in so-called "varietal" wines made with one dominant grape variety for easier identification by international consumers, lower alcohol products and new marketing techniques to seduce female and younger clients.



Wine tasting at "Women & Wine," part of the 2011 Vinexpo show, in Bordeaux-Lac, southwestern France.

AFP/Jean Pierre Muller